

What librarians say they want from their professional associations: A survey of business librarians

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Abstract:

Library organizations exist to provide professional development, networking, and service and presentation opportunities to librarians. Yet membership in many library organizations is declining. A survey of business librarians from all types of libraries provided data on benefits of membership. Respondents identified characteristics of successful organizations as well as reasons for their disappointments. Quality programming and training, networking opportunities, and member engagement were positives while poor communication and a lack of opportunities to get involved were the most common concerns. The article concludes with four recommendations on ways library organizations can remain relevant, useful, and valued to their members.

Keywords: business librarians | organization membership | professional development | professional organizations

Article:

Introduction

Library professional organizations are facing numerous challenges and growing uncertainty, while increasingly librarians are foregoing formal organizational memberships to instead connect, learn, and network with each other in new and innovative ways. Based on public or internal numbers from major library organizations, membership in these groups is declining.¹

¹ The authors examined membership for the American Library Association (ALA), Reference And User Services Association (RUSA), Business Reference And Services Section (BRASS), and Special Library Association (ALA). Between 2006 and 2018, ALA and RUSA membership fell 11% and 46%, respectively (American Library Association, 2018). Between 2006 and 2020, BRASS membership fell 42% (according to unpublished RUSA

Why are many librarians not joining professional organizations or renewing their memberships? What do librarians want from their organizations and how are professional development needs changing? The authors wanted to explore these questions and conducted a survey within one area of librarian specialization, business librarianship.

The authors are both business librarians and wanted to determine how business librarians perceived the value of membership in library organizations. Business librarians are frequently called upon to provide quick and timely responses for clients and students who are contemplating momentous decisions that can benefit from business research and the assistance of a librarian researcher. Some clients are nervously starting a small business, other patrons are deciding whether to invest in a particular company's stock, students are frequently researching a company before a job interview, and always there are requests for the most current data on any number of topics. In order to remain current concerning business trends and thoroughly knowledgeable about research that is vital to clients, the value of recurrent and deep collaborations with other business librarians cannot be overstated. One seemingly reliable avenue for these collaborations is the professional library organization.

It is important to clarify the function of an organization. According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978, p. 23) "organizations are collections of individual efforts that are coordinated to achieve things that could not be achieved through individual action alone." Pfeffer (1997, p. 8) goes on to state "an organization is viable and survives only as long as the inducements-contributions balance is positive, such that the available inducements are sufficient to produce the voluntary contributions of participation and effort necessary to maintain the organization." Organizations, therefore, exist to achieve the common goals of its members. They survive only when their members perceive sufficient benefit to remain.

The survey conducted serves as an environmental scan to assess what librarians are looking for and willing to pay for in their professional organizations. The article concludes with recommendations to leaders of library organizations based on the survey responses from business librarians employed in many types of libraries.

Literature review

Articles concerning why professional organizations can be vital to the professional development of librarians are fairly numerous. Goldman (2014) advocates for the value of state and regional associations. Benefits in such involvement include affordability, smaller travel distances to workshops and conferences, increased availability of networking opportunities, and ease of gaining a leadership role. Attebury (2015) applies the literature on best practices of adult education concepts to the events planned by library professional organizations. Adult education principles (andragogy) include transformational learning, communities of practice, and instructional design. Attebury asserts that organizations should plan activities with these principles in mind. Letnikova (2015) documents the history of the Library Information Literacy Advisory Committee (LILAC), a "voluntary professional organization" at City University of New York (CUNY). The goals of LILAC are driven by the "intelligence, enthusiasm,

Executive Director Staff Reports). Between January 31, 2017 and December 31, 2019, SLA membership fell 31% (Noorlander, 2020).

cheerfulness, and commitment” of its members and every activity of LILAC contributes to the professional development of those members.

In her survey of mostly public librarians, Kamm (1997) found that networking opportunities was the most common reason for librarians joining a professional association. For the small number of surveyed librarians who had dropped an association membership, the cost of membership was the most common reason. Lack of local opportunities for involvement and political advocacy were other reasons mentioned. Frank (1997) conducted focus groups on the value of being active in professional organizations. Benefits include development of leadership skills, opportunities for research and publication, and growing a sense of professional community. Challenges for engagement with professional organizations include the need for financial support, the significant time commitments, and the stress of dealing with complex organizations; one librarian surveyed by Frank remarked “it is very difficult to ‘figure out’ associations such as ALA or SLA.” Barr-Walker, Werner, Kellermeyer, and Bass (2020) assert that “Professional organizations have a role to play in raising awareness about impostor phenomenon and supporting librarians with educational and mentorship opportunities.” Librarian organizations can “work together across disciplines ... to share expertise and connect members in different job roles for peer-mentoring programs. Local chapters may be able to play a role in creating a network of supportive colleagues and mentorship.”

Slightly less common in the literature are surveys of librarians on their attitudes and experiences with professional associations. Using a “hermeneutic phenomenological approach,” Attebury (2017) interviewed 10 librarians regarding the “professional development activities that they believe have had a meaningful or transformational impact on themselves and their careers.” The most common benefit is sustained community-based professional development. Such activity included both “on-the-job learning” (interaction with colleagues at one’s library) as well as institutes and interactive association work involving professionals from other libraries. Davidson and Middleton (2006) surveyed science and engineering librarians on the “roles membership and participation in professional organizations play in mentoring and/or retention to the field.” When asked “What do you gain most from your professional activity in this organization?”, the responders identified networking as the main benefit, followed by professional development.

Henczel (2014) conducted “semi-structured interviews” with 52 members of national library associations in the USA, UK, Australia, and New Zealand. The interviews suggested that through engagement with professional associations, librarians get opportunities to further develop their skills which contributes to career success. Engagement with organizations also helps build a sense of community within the profession. Finally, Bennett (2011) interviewed ten librarians who joined non-library professional organizations regarding the value of that membership. All of the interviewed librarians found value in the membership that could be applied to “collection development, instruction, and liaison activities.”

An emerging topic in the literature is the need for library professional organizations to reinvent themselves to remain relevant and affordable. Lumpkin (2016) asserts that “Mirroring the challenges and opportunities facing the library world in general, professional associations also face the task of re-invention. Whether this evolution is perceived as a Herculean burden, or a welcome exercise in reinvigoration, the question mark of value rests heavy on the heads of

library associations.” While membership in a professional association might once have been a given for a new librarian, that may no longer be the case. Lumpkin asks, “how do we engage those who are currently turned off or turned away from [professional associations]?” Social media and online conferencing tools can provide networking and content formerly only available at a traditional conference. Lumpkin suggests that “we change the argument for the value of membership from one which is transactional to transformational.” Strong mentoring programs can lead to that transforming change.

In response to continued membership declines in the Music Library Association (MLA), Saucedo and Clark (2018) surveyed MLA members regarding their professional development needs and other topics. Survey respondents identified continuing education activities as the most important aspect of professional development. Given declining membership, the authors suggest that “While the vast majority of survey respondents value their MLA membership, the association should think carefully about how to better assess (and thus address) the needs of those who have canceled their memberships or who are possibly interested in joining.”

American Library Association (ALA), the Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS) of Reference and User Service Association (part of ALA), and Special Library Association (SLA) are all considering their futures. ALA has reported declining membership for many years and has provided as one explanation the “feelings of disconnectedness and challenges for newer members to find their home within ALA.” (American Library Association [ALA], 2020). BRASS formed a task force to study its future in the wake of declining membership and budget shortfalls in its parent organization, RUSA (Future of BRASS Task Force, January 11, 2019). The scenarios explored by the task force included BRASS joining other, presumably healthier organizations like Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), Public Library Association (PLA), and Special Libraries Association (SLA), forming its own independent organization, or becoming an ALA round table. A past SLA board member recently noted that “like many other professional associations, SLA has had to transition to ensure its continuing relevance and success in our new economic and societal paradigm. In recent years, SLA leaders have had to make difficult decisions and possess the courage and strength to bring about significant change across the association.” (Schachter, 2019)

Methodology

A survey was created to gauge and understand the perceived value of membership in professional library associations as it relates to a business librarian’s professional trajectory (see Appendix A). The intent was to determine whether business librarians were satisfied or dissatisfied with library association membership as it related to the perceived value afforded by the membership. The authors wanted to determine value and satisfaction by examining the study in three questions: how have organizational memberships benefited librarians’ careers, have librarians been disappointed in their organizations and in what ways, and do successful organizations have distinct characteristics.

The survey included 14 questions. Three questions were open-ended, and the rest were multiple choice. Some multiple-choice questions included an “other” option which allowed for further comments which provided qualitative context to the question. Initial base-line questions

established the librarians' job function, and whether they had ever been members of a business-related library association, followed by an open-ended question to identify those specific associations. Survey logic was included with some questions. Respondents who answered no to whether they had ever been a member of a library organization were not required to answer further questions about library organizations. Those respondents who answered no when asked whether they had ever been disappointed with a library organization skipped the following questions that then further explored disappointment in organizations.

Personally identifiable information was excluded from the survey, but questions regarding participants' career status were important to the results. Therefore, data collected included the type of library, job title and length of employment. The majority of the questions asked about value in library membership, including the characteristics of successful organizations and the realized benefits that contributed to the significant growth as a professional librarian. Two additional questions asked respondents whether they had feelings of disappointment or frustration in their organization(s), and to identify reasons organizations had not met their expectations of value.

The survey was created using the online survey software Qualtrics. The survey was then distributed from March 1, 2019 to April 11, 2019 to email discussion groups (listservs) heavily utilized by business librarians. These email discussion lists included: BUSLIB-L (Northern Arizona University) and BRASS-L (ALA). Participation was invited from U.S. regional discussion lists: NJLibsGrowBiz, Business Librarianship in North Carolina (BLINC), a section of the North Carolina Library Association, Capital Area Business Academic Librarians (CABAL), Business Interest Group – Chicago (BIG), and the Carolinas Chapter of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) that includes librarians who work in business, government and other institutions. Results from Qualtrics were exported into Excel for analysis.

Results

The survey generated 140 complete responses. One hundred and thirty-six respondents identified as business librarians or their formal job functions included some aspect of aiding patrons with business-related research. There were nine partial responses not included in the results. Four respondents who did not identify as business librarians were prevented from completing the survey and any answers were expunged from the survey sample.

Not all survey participants had some aspect of business or business-related nomenclature in their job titles. Sixty-eight of 136 respondents had the words business or entrepreneurship in their formal job titles.

Types of libraries

These librarians were largely from academic libraries (99;73%), followed by public librarians (24;18%), librarians in special libraries (10;7%) and librarians in a non-library setting (3;2%). Survey participant longevity in librarianship varied widely as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Library type.

Type	(n, %)
Academic library	99, 73
Public library	24, 18
Special library	10, 7
Non-library setting	3, 2
Total	136, 100

Membership in library organizations

Survey respondents were asked about their memberships in library organizations and also memberships in business library organizations, whether unique business associations or business-related subsets of larger professional library organizations. Overwhelmingly, respondents were or had been at some point in their career a member of a professional library organization (133;97%). When asked to identify whether they were currently a member of a business library organization, 74% of survey respondents (100;74%) answered that they were currently a member of a professional business library organization or a business subunit of a larger professional library organization, whether local, regional, state, national or international. Of those, respondents were primarily academic librarians (74;74%) followed by public librarians (17;17%), librarians employed in special libraries (8;8%) and librarians in non-library settings (1;1%). Thirty-six respondents were not members of a library-related business organization. Table 2 identifies business library organizations named by survey participants of which they are or have been members.

Table 2. Business library organizations.

Business library organizations	Responses
Business Reference And Services Section (BRASS)	55
Business and Finance Division, Special Libraries Association (SLA)	24
Capital Area Business Academic Librarians (CABAL)	10
Business Librarianship in North Carolina (BLINC)	9
Business Interest Group of Librarians (BIG)	7
American Business Library Directors (ABLD)	6
NJLibsGrowBiz	3
European Business School Librarians' Group (EBSLB)	3
Asia Pacific Business School Librarians' Group (APBSLG)	3

Successful organizations

What factors determine organization success? Survey respondents were asked to select up to three reasons but were given the opportunity to supply others. Almost equally, the two most selected reasons for success were continued relevancy (85;15%) and great programming (82;15%). The next most common responses included on-going training (67;12%), good leadership (57;10%), and reasonable membership fees (57;10%). The responses to the questions related to successful organizations can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of successful library organizations.

Characteristics ^a	(n, %)
Continued relevancy	85, 15
Great programming	82, 15
On-going training	67, 12
Good leadership	57, 10
Reasonable membership dues	57, 10
Timely communication	52, 9
Job opening notifications	39, 7
Future vision	37, 7
Advocacy for members	30, 5
Use of technology	23, 4
Location	12, 2
Other	9, 2
Total	550, 100

^a Select up to 3.

Years in the field of business librarianship did not tell a different story. Regardless of time spent in the profession, the most successful organizations, according to the survey findings, were those that continued to be relevant to their members and those that provided relevant and on-going training and programming for their members (Table 4).

Table 4. Characteristics of successful library organizations by years in the profession.

	Total responses	Years in the profession						
		1–2 years	3–6 years	7–12 years	13–18 years	19–25 years	26–35 years	36–45 years
<i>Characteristics^a</i>								
Continued relevancy	85	2	19	17	11	20	9	7
Great programming	82	2	16	17	13	17	7	10
On-going training	67	4	12	14	9	16	6	6
Good leadership	57	3	13	14	9	8	4	6
Reasonable membership dues	57	1	16	10	8	12	6	4
Timely communication	52	4	9	12	9	12	3	3
Job opening notifications	39	2	6	8	7	10	3	3
Future vision	37	0	9	12	4	2	4	6
Advocacy for members	30	1	7	8	2	7	3	2
Use of technology	23	1	3	6	3	5	3	2
Location	12	1	3	1	1	2	4	0
Total respondents	133	5	29	32	16	29	11	11

^a Select up to 3.

What was seen as organizational success in one type of library was not necessarily seen in others. Academic librarians, which made up 70% of participants, selected great programming (64), continued relevancy (63), and on-going training (46) as the most important characteristics of success, while public librarian respondents which accounted for 20% of the surveyed librarians said on-going training (15), good leadership (13), continued relevancy (12), and reasonable membership dues (12) were what they looked for. Survey participants from special libraries (8%) specified continued relevancy (9) and on-going training (6) as their top priorities,

and librarians in nontraditional library settings (2%) found advocacy for members (2), good leadership (2), great programming (2), and job openings (2) to be characteristic of successful organizations (Table 5).

Table 5. Organization success characteristics by library type.

	Total	Academic library	Public library	Special library	Non-library setting
<i>Characteristics^a</i>					
Continued relevancy	85	63	12	9	1
Great programming	82	64	11	5	2
On-going training	67	46	15	6	0
Good leadership	57	37	13	5	2
Reasonable membership dues	57	41	12	4	0
Timely communication	52	34	11	5	2
Job opening notifications	39	25	9	3	2
Future vision	37	25	7	4	1
Advocacy for members	30	17	8	3	2
Use of technology	23	17	4	1	1
Location	12	8	4	0	0
Total respondents	133	97	23	10	3

^a Select up to 3.

Table 6. Ways library organizational membership(s) benefit growth as a librarian.

Responses ^a	(n, %)
Programming (workshops/training)	108, 14
Networking	104, 14
Conferences (recurring)	101, 13
Presentation opportunities	80, 10
Resource sharing	67, 9
Skills development	62, 8
Leadership opportunities	56, 7
Job opening notifications	52, 7
Collaborations	51, 7
Explorations of emerging technologies	34, 4
Peer-mentoring	33, 4
Announcements of funding opportunities	16, 2
Other	5, 1
Total	769, 100

^a Check all that apply.

Career development

Study participants were asked to indicate ways their professional memberships benefited their growth as a librarian. They could select all that applied. Respondents replied that programming, which included workshops and training, and with 108 responses, was the most relevant career enhancing benefit received from organizational membership. Programming importance was followed closely by the selections of networking opportunities (104) and the organization offering recurring conferences (101), again showing value and growth potential for members by

offering consistent programs and the ability to interface with other library professionals (Table 6).

The survey tells us that librarians highly value the ability to present their professional accomplishments to their peers. Sixty percent of respondents (80) selected presentation opportunities as a growth opportunity they received from organizational membership that was helpful to their careers.

Public librarians, special librarians, and non-librarian setting librarians rated resource sharing selection much higher (67) than academic librarians. This may indicate the greater importance of free resources to the latter types of librarians, compared to academic librarians who often have more subscription business research databases available.

The most pervasive themes to emerge were the necessity of organizations to provide and facilitate meetings where librarians can gather together, whether in person or virtual, along with delivering learning opportunities. One librarian offered that it “helps to know what other librarians are doing” as a strategy to inform pathways to career trajectory and success.

Somewhat surprisingly, peer-mentoring opportunities offered by organizations did not rank particularly high, with only 33 responses (24%). One survey respondent noted “The mentoring program I tried to participate in failed miserably. As a result, I am highly skeptical of “mentoring programs” run by organizations that do nothing more than exchange emails and phone numbers for folks in mentoring relationships. Mentoring needs a face-to-face component.”

Disappointment in library organizations

The majority of respondents, when asked if they had ever experienced disappointment in a library organization, replied in the affirmative (71%). The most common reasons selected from the survey were poor communication with members (35%), too little or no invitations to get involved (33%), not enough engagement with members (31%), and location of the organization or travel restrictions (30%). These reasons were closely followed in significance by poor leadership (29%). One respondent commented “ALA is too big and clunky, and I am always disappointed by the quality of content at conferences.” Another librarian complained that organizations are “mired in bureaucracy and top-heavy organizational charts where actionable, valuable and relevant programming and committee opportunities become buried.” (Table 7).

Although membership dues, conference fees, and other monetary considerations for organizations, reasonable or otherwise, did not rank as highly as communication issues in the survey, with twenty nine percent responding that fees were a disappointment issue, membership costs were mentioned often in qualitative responses. These frustrations included access to limited professional development funds and the cost of joining organizations. Some respondents said membership dues and programming costs are pricing some librarians out, with one commenting that organizations are “too expensive to join.” One participant was frustrated that “there is an additional cost on top of annual membership fees to view a webcast.” Other comments mentioned value as a frustration when budgeting funds for membership. One participant noted “increasing membership costs with little return on investment” while another commented “I

don't feel I get enough ROI in terms of having to pay for a national membership to be a part of a business section.”

Table 7. Disappointments in library organizations.

Selected^a	(n, %)
Poor communication	35, 11
No or too few invitations to contribute/get involved	33, 11
Lacks engagement with members	31, 10
Travel/location	30, 10
Poor leadership	29, 10
Funds	29, 10
Content not related to my job or research field	28, 9
Other	28, 9
Little or no programming	19, 6
No mentoring opportunities	16, 5
Too many members	11, 4
No use of technology/innovation	8, 3
Too few members	3, 1
Total	300, 100

^a Check all that apply.

Survey participants added comments about engagement in organizational leadership opportunities. Several mentioned the difficulty of getting involved in an organization because there were no guidelines to assist them in how to go about it. Others said a problem with involvement came from too few members being in charge of decisions, one responding “relevant opportunities to engage are filled by a small number of established people.” One librarian felt organizations for them are no longer relevant because they spend time on “discussions about irrelevant topics or outdated attitudes.”

Many comments focused on programming and professional development. Four librarians mentioned that programming in organizations was always the same, with respondents saying conferences were “too ‘vanilla’.” Other librarians lamented that programming was “too repetitive” and featured “low quality content.”

Some commenters emphasized the importance of welcoming early career librarians and providing programming to support their needs. One wrote “The best [organizations] have a culture of specifically reaching out to new members and offering manageable ways for newbies to engage with the group.” Meanwhile, several respondents complained of the lack of programming to support the needs of mid-career business librarians.

Other comments

Survey participants were offered the opportunity to comment further about library organizations. About one-third (31%) responded and were willing to share more.

Respondents who indicated that their membership experiences had been positive agreed that the organizations serve as a useful resource and can help with professional development which may be beneficial toward promotions and possible higher earnings.

Professional development value and career advancement benefits that librarians saw in memberships took many forms:

- I am on so many [organization] listservs that are extremely useful and help me stay current on trends and emerging issues.
- Also belong to [local group] which holds open, quarterly meetings. This is a wonderful forum to stay current.
- Without the service and leadership opportunities afforded to me through the various [library organization] committees, I would not have been promoted I feel.

There was frequent mention of the value of smaller, local or specialized organizations for professional development:

- I have found local regional organizations to be more beneficial than larger organizations who pursue causes unrelated to librarianship and have cost prohibitive memberships.
- I prefer smaller organizations with well-defined opportunities to contribute to the mission and further my professional development.
- A very focused organization (such as my current one) is much more rewarding than a mega-group.
- I focus on specialized groups (like BRASS or CABAL).
- I may not get everything I need from a professional standpoint from ALA but I think my state and library system have been able to provide me with quality opportunities for professional development.

One librarian provided advice for groups of any size: “Organizations need to continually evaluate what their purpose and goals are, and then find useful and efficient ways to involve members.”

Additional research

Further research studies might include asking librarians who have never belonged to a professional library organization the reasons why they chose not to join. It might also be enlightening to consult new librarians about their inclination to join or not join a national or state library organization in lieu of other professional development choices they might consider.

Discussion

The survey results provide insight into what business librarians in many types of libraries want from their professional library associations. In addition, the survey also identifies business librarians’ key frustrations in their current organizations. These frustrations include poor communication, too few opportunities for involvement, limited engagement with members, and travel restrictions due to meeting locations and cost. The survey responses indicate that library

organizations remain most valuable to their members when they provide active and consistent communication and up-to-date and relevant programming.

Local and regional associations and informal groups frequently offer the opportunity to create cohesive networks, to mentor new librarians, and to more easily collaborate in regional and state conferences. A smaller organization might be the right size to offer more confidence to an apprehensive professional new to the business librarianship field. Surveyed librarians indicated they benefit from having access to choice when it comes to organizations.

Respondents' replies to the survey suggested four areas of improvement in organizations:

- Communication with members is vital to organizational success; it should be timely, meaningful and selective with stated goals.
- Involve all members; librarians must feel they are a valued member of the organization, that their opinions matter and are considered, and that they are receiving a fair return on their investment.
- Programs, conferences, and content should be tailored to the stated organizational mission; the mission must remain relevant and forward thinking in keeping with the changing demands of the library profession.
- Travel restrictions and programming fees should be considered by planning committees when designing professional development opportunities.

Based on the survey results, the authors recommend the following best practices for librarian professional organizations. Proactive recruitment of new members and intentional welcoming of first-time attendees are among the most important behaviors of any successful organization. Such behavior helps reduce anxiety in early career librarians and build a sense of community for all members. These behaviors need to become core aspects of the organizational culture. Opportunities abound to embrace this inclusive attitude. Organizations can begin each workshop or meeting (in person or online) by welcoming new members. If a leader or workshop facilitator does not know who is new, then ask. Make a note of the new members and make sure those persons have had an opportunity to share at some point in the workshop. When an organization is recruiting for leadership roles, outgoing officers and/or the nominations committee should invite some newer members to run or volunteer.

Networking is vital. Healthy organizations need to provide ample opportunity for members to share experiences (good and bad), insights, and suggestions, and also opportunities for members to build friendships and have fun. Conferences, workshops, and meetings should include formal and informal networking time. One example of a formal networking strategy is beginning an event with a discussion of "What is new or interesting with you at work?" and asking every attendee to respond (briefly, if many people are present). Through such intentional networking activities can an organization become a community in which each member feels valued.

Communication initiated by the organization must be relevant, timely, and two-way. Relevant messages reflect the stated professional development needs of the members as well as promote official activities and events of the organization. Timely communication not only supports members regarding trending topics but also proves to members that the organization is active and

useful throughout the year, not just before and after a scheduled event. Finally, members need to feel encouraged and empowered to communicate with organization leaders as well as each other. Such interaction contributes to the sense of community, strengthens emotional attachment to the organization, and provides ongoing evidence that the organization remains worth belonging to.

Member discussions or polling on desired programming should happen frequently. Organizations should provide relevant content grounded in current needs – not historic needs – of both early career and mid-career members. Calls for feedback on programming contribute to members feeling respected and appreciated. If an organization is centered on the work of committees, the focus of the committees needs to be discussed and reevaluated periodically, lest the organization become locked into topics that become less relevant year by year while emerging topics (such as entrepreneurship and teaching business research) get ignored. Therefore, organizations must be responsive and nimble.

Librarian organizations should provide frequent opportunities for members to present. There is much value in librarians teaching and sharing with other librarians. Vibrant groups do not need to outsource a significant amount of their programming to vendors or other outside speakers. Focus on interactive programming facilitated by your own members, utilizing their strengths and experiences. However, some discussions with outsiders (vendors, government and non-governmental organization officials, business and nonprofit leaders, and entrepreneurs) whose work relates to librarianship can be informative and beneficial. If you do bring in vendors, organize the event as a discussion and feedback session, not basic interface training.

Programming must remain affordable. Requiring registration and travel to a distant conference is not an option for many librarians. Online programming and shorter but more frequent physical gatherings at the local or regional level are solid alternatives to the traditional, expensive conference.

Conclusion

Aware that many librarian organizations have been losing members at a significant rate, the authors surveyed business librarians on their views and experiences with their organizations. The survey had 133 usable responses from business librarians. Respondents identified continued relevance, high quality programming, and on-going training as the most important characteristics of successful organizations. For their own growth as professionals, programming (including training), networking opportunities, and regular conferences were valued the most. Surprising to the authors, mentoring was not perceived as a major importance. Poor communication and a lack of opportunities to get involved were the biggest disappointments identified with organizations. While not ranked as high in the survey data, costs of membership and conference attendance were frequent complaints in the written comments. A number of librarians wrote that they preferred smaller and/or regional associations to meet their professional development needs. Based on survey data and comments, the authors identified four best practices for effective library organizations: timely, meaningful, and selective communication; inclusive and proactive engagement with members with emphasis on welcoming new members and early career librarians; programming based on the current needs of members; and inexpensive or free programming easily available to members. Organizations that follow these best practices are

more likely to have satisfied and engaged members and are less likely to face declining membership.

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Appendix A: Survey questions

1. Are you currently employed as a business librarian, or do your formal job functions include some aspect of assisting patrons with business-related research?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Are you currently a member of a professional business library organization or a business subunit of a larger professional library organization (local/regional/state/national/international)?
 - Yes
 - No
3. Please provide the names of any business library organizations and/or business subunits of a larger library organization of which you are a member.
4. Are you currently or have you even been a member of a professional library organization?
 - Yes
 - No
5. What are some characteristics of professional library organizations that help make them successful? (select up to 3)
 - good leadership
 - timely communication
 - continued relevancy
 - future vision
 - great programming

- on-going training
 - location
 - use of technology
 - advocacy for members
 - job opening notification
 - reasonable membership dues
 - other
6. Identify ways your professional library organizational membership(s) has benefited your growth as a librarian. (check all that apply)
- programming (workshops/training)
 - conferences (recurring)
 - networking
 - peer-mentoring
 - resource sharing
 - presentation opportunities
 - leadership opportunities
 - skills development
 - collaborations
 - job opening notifications
 - explorations of emerging technologies
 - announcements of funding opportunities
 - other
7. When you think about the value of a professional library organization membership as it pertains to your professional growth, have you ever experienced disappointment or frustration in that organization?
- Yes
 - No
8. Identify the disappointment(s) or frustration(s) with your participation in professional library organizations. (check all that apply)
- content not related to my job or research field
 - lacks engagement with members
 - no or too few invitations to contribute or get involved
 - no use of technology/innovation
 - little or no programming
 - poor communication
 - poor leadership
 - funds
 - travel/location
 - too many members
 - too few members
 - no mentoring opportunities

- other

9. Do you have other comments about organizations in general?

10. How many years, in total, have you been employed as a professional librarian?

- 1–2 years
- 3–6 years
- 7–12 years
- 13–18 years
- 19–25 years
- 26–35 years
- 36–45 years

11. In what type of library are you currently employed?

- public library
- academic library
- special library
- a non-library setting
- self-employed

12. What is your age range?

- 20–29
- 30–39
- 40–49
- 50–59
- 60–69
- 70–79
- 80+
- decline to answer

13. What is your job title?